

P 081536Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2167
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C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 000256

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2019

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SUBJECT: MALTA: FOREIGN MINISTER HOPEFUL THAT COOPERATION
WITH ITALY AND LIBYA LEADING TO "NEW PHASE" IN EFFORTS TO
CONTAIN IRREGULAR MIGRATION

REF: VALLETTA 169

Classified By: CDA Jason Davis, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) In a June 8 meeting, Maltese Foreign Minister Tonio Borg told Charge he was leaving later in the day to meet with his Libyan and Italian counterparts in Rome, with "illegal immigration" on the agenda. Borg said he was feeling cautiously optimistic, particularly because of the sharp reduction in immigrant arrivals that had followed Italy's recent controversial return of 500 immigrants to Libya. In contrast to the first three months of this year, when the arrival of 750 immigrants (reftel) had broken all previous records for those months, May had seen only 66 arrivals in Malta, and there had so far been none at all in June. "If June numbers are as low as May's," he said, "I will have to conclude that we are entering a new phase" in efforts to deal with the phenomenon.

¶2. (C) Borg said he attributed the decrease to several key developments. First, it was likely that Libya had agreed to take the 500 as a gesture of "thanks" to Italy for signing an agreement according to which Italy would provide 250 million euros worth of projects (via Italian companies) to Libya annually for the next 20 years -- a total of 4 billion euros -- as "compensation for the colonial past." An additional "thank-you" from Libya, Borg opined, was action taken by Libyan authorities in the form of "raids" against human smugglers in the key port towns of Zuwera and Zliten, which had reportedly stopped 200 would-be migrants from departing Libya. Finally, these new developments had likely had a chilling effect on the migrants themselves, who were probably understandably reluctant to spend their life savings -- upwards of 1000 euros in many cases -- on a trip that was likely to end in their being returned to Libya.

¶3. (C) Borg took some credit for the upcoming tripartite ministerial in Rome, saying that he had initially approached his Libyan counterpart, Musa Kusa, whom he had known for some time, to suggest a three-way meeting. Kusa's response had been "you arrange it and I will come." Borg promised a full readout from the Rome meeting following his return to Malta later this week.

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